

## Message Text

SECRET

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00  
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SSM-03 /049 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:LEPOPE:GCB  
APPROVED BY NEA:NAVELIOTES  
NEA/ARN:DRAPER

-----075380 070502Z /21

O R 070330Z DEC 77  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T STATE 291546

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, LE

SUBJECT: CONVERSATIONS WITH BASHIR GEMAYEL

1. IN HABIB'S ABSENCE ATHERTON MET WITH BASHIR GEMAYEL AND ALFRED MADY OF THE KATA'IB POLITBURO DECEMBER 3 FOR OVER HOUR, AND VELIOTES HOSTED LENGTHY INFORMAL LUNCH FOR HIM ON THE EIGHTH FLOOR DECEMBER 5 ALSO ATTENDED BY DRAPER, STODDARD, HOWELL, AND POPE (NO DOD OR CIA REPS WERE THERE).

2. GEMAYEL TOOK AN OUTWARDLY MODERATE LINE WITH US, AS HE HAS IN HIS PUBLIC APPEARANCES HERE, BUT THE CORE OF HIS POSITION WAS OBDURATE. HE SAID HE WANTED TO DISPEL A MIS-CONCEPTION HE SAID HE KNEW WAS WIDELY HELD IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT: THAT "THOSE BLOODTHIRSTY CHRISTIANS" WANTED PARTITION. THIS WAS FALSE, HE SAID, ALTHOUGH THERE WERE  
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"NUANCES" TO THIS POSITION. HE WANTED A UNITED LEBANON. AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS OPPOSED TO A RETURN TO THE BANKRUPT STATUS QUO ANTE OF THE NATIONAL PACT. HE WAS VAGUE ABOUT IDEAS FOR SPECIFIC POLITICAL REFORM, WHICH HE ADMITTED HAD YET TO BE WORKED OUT, BUT SAID THAT SOME SORT OF "DECENTRAL-IZATION" WAS NECESSARY TO PREVENT DE JURE PARTITION. DE FACTO PARTITION ALREADY EXISTS. REFORM WOULD HAVE TO BE

RADICAL. THERE WAS NO POINT IN GOING BACK TO THE OLD SYSTEM OF MEDIOCRITY AND COMPROMISE. A NEW SYSTEM, HE SAID, SHOULD OFFER "EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES" BUT DEMAND "EQUAL OBLIGATIONS" BY ALL THOSE READY TO PUT LEBANON FIRST. SUCH NECESSARY CHANGES SHOULD HAVE BEEN MADE MONTHS AGO BY SARKIS. NOW THE GAP BETWEEN FACTIONS WAS WIDER THAN EVER, AND HE WAS AFRAID REFORM MIGHT COME TOO LATE. HE WAS CRITICAL OF SARKIS FOR TRYING TO PERPETUATE THE STRONG, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONCEPT, WITH ITS CHEHABIST PHILOSOPHY, G-2 TRAPPINGS, ETC. PRESSED REPEATEDLY TO BE MORE SPECIFIC, HE RETREATED TO PHRASES SUCH AS "ALLOWING DIVERSITY TO THRIVE WITHIN A UNIFIED STATE". HE ADMITTED THAT LEBANON'S FAILURE TO DEVELOP AN ADEQUATE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WAS A DISGRACE. UNDER HIS DECENTRALIZED STATE, THERE WOULD, THEREFORE, BE A PLACE FOR A STRONG EDUCATION MINISTRY IN THE OTHERWISE RATHER WEAK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. HE ASKED FOR U.S. SUPPORT FOR SUCH REFORMS.

3. ATHERTON EXPLAINED BASIC PRINCIPLE OF OUR POLICY IN LEBANON WAS SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT SARKIS AND HIS UNIFYING POLICIES. HE OUTLINED ROLE OF OUR MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID PROGRAMS IN THIS CONNECTION. WE THOUGHT THAT SOME REFORM OF THE LEBANESE SYSTEM WAS NECESSARY. WHEN PRESIDENT SARKIS FELT THE TIME WAS RIGHT TO ATTEMPT OR NEGOTIATE SOME RESTRUCTURING, WE WOULD STAND BEHIND HIM. WE WERE NOT NECESSARILY OPPOSED TO IDEAS FOR DECENTRALIZATION AND WOULD BE OPEN-SECRET

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MINDED OR SUPPORTIVE ABOUT THE CONCEPT, IF RPT IF IT ENJOYED BROAD SUPPORT NATIONALLY.

4. GEMAYEL'S CRITICISMS OF THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE ALSO APPLIED TO A NATIONAL ARMY. HE WAS NOT SO MUCH AGAINST THE BUILDING OF THE ARMY AS HE WAS AGAINST THE OUTDATED PHILOSOPHY WHICH WOULD AFFECT ITS EMPLOYMENT I.E. AS AN INSTRUMENT OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. IT WOULD REPEAT THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST. CITING PAST OCCASIONS WHEN THE ARMY HAD FAILED TO PROTECT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, THANKS TO THE OBSOLETE "SYSTEM", HE ARGUED THAT THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO RELY ON ANY NEW ARMY FOR PROTECTION. THE MAIN FUTURE PROBLEM FOR THE CHRISTIANS IS SURVIVAL. WE DO NOT WANT ANOTHER ARMAGEDDON.

5. THE ONE POINT HE WAS CLEAR ON WAS THAT DECENTRALIZATION MUST INVOLVE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL MILITARY UNITS ALONG CONFESSIONAL LINES, ALTHOUGH THEY COULD BE NOMINALLY UNDER A UNIFIED COMMAND. HE WAS SCORNFUL OF PRESENT ATTEMPTS TO REBUILD THE ARMY, AND OUR ROLE, AND CHALLENGED US TO POINT TO ANY EVIDENCE THAT IT EVEN EXISTED, MUCH LESS THAT IT COULD PLAY AN EFFECTIVE ROLE. IT WAS FOR SHOW

ONLY, HE ARGUED. HE HAD SOME CONFIDENCE IN KHOURY, BUT  
UNLESS HE WERE ALLOWED TO BUILD SEPARATE CONFESSIONAL FORCES  
AS A FIRST STEP HE WOULD NOT SUCCEED.

6. GEMAYEL WAS ALSO CRITICAL OF THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT.  
PHASES ONE AND TWO HAD BEEN A HYPOCRITICAL MISE EN SCENE  
(WE DID NOT ARGUE WITH HIM MUCH ON THIS POINT) AND HE  
OPPOSED PHASE THREE IN THE SOUTH INTER ALIA BECAUSE (1)  
IT WOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED, (2) A CLAUSE IN THE SHTAURA  
AGREEMENT WOULD ALLOW THE INTRODUCTION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS  
TO LEBANON UNDER PALESTINIAN COVER, AND (3) EVEN IF THE  
PALESTINIANS DID MOVE OUT OF THE SOUTH THEY WOULD ONLY  
MOVE TO JEZZINE AND THE SHOUF AND CAUSE WORSE PROBLEMS.  
WE PRESSED HIM TO SUGGEST ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE  
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SOUTH, BUT THE UPSHOT OF HIS REMARKS WAS THAT HE PREFERRED  
THE STATUS QUO TO SHTAURA. WE MADE ESPECIALLY CLEAR THAT  
WE HAD OUR OWN INTERESTS TO CONSIDER AND WOULD DO OUR BEST  
TO SEE THAT PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWALS OCCURRED.

7. IT MAY BE OF INTEREST THAT AT ONE POINT WHEN WE HELD  
UP THE EXAMPLE OF THE PNL HANDING OVER ITS SHERMANS TO THE  
ARMY, GEMAYEL SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED TO CAMILLE CHAMOUN  
ONLY AN HOUR OR SO BEFORE TO CHECK THIS VERY POINT (WHICH  
CAPTAIN NEHME HAD ALSO MENTIONED TO HIM) AND CHAMOUN HAD  
DENIED VEHEMENTLY THAT ANY TRANSFER HAD OCCURRED. IN FACT,  
SAID GEMAYEL, CHAMOUN HAD TOLD HIM THAT IF HE COULD GET  
MORE TANKS FROM THE AMERICANS HE OUGHT TO BRING SOME BACK.  
WE PRESUME THIS CONFLICT REFLECTS A LACK OF COMMUNICATION  
BETWEEN DANY AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN, AS WELL AS PNL-KATA'IB  
RIVALRY.

8. WE BARELY TOUCHED ISRAELI-MARONITE COOPERATION. WHILE  
SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS, HE ADMITTED THAT THE ADF  
HAD CAUSED FEWER PROBLEMS AND FRICTIONS THAN ANTICIPATED.  
HE, LIKE HIS FATHER, HAD CONFIDENCE IN ASSAD, BUT NOT  
NECESSARILY HIS SUBORDINATES OR SYRIAN AGENTS IN LEBANON.  
IT WAS A GREAT TEMPTATION FOR THE SYRIANS TO MEDDLE POLI-  
TICALLY IN LEBANON AND USE THE THREAT OF JAILING THOSE WHO  
OPPOSED SYRIAN ACTIONS. HE ASSERTED THAT CERTAIN LEBANESE  
GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS WERE BEING MADE TAKING  
INTO ACCOUNT THE SYRIAN FACTOR. WITHOUT HIDING HIS DE-  
TESTATION OF THE PALESTINIANS, HE HAD NO QUICK ANSWERS TO  
THIS PROBLEM, AND DIDN'T ARGUE WITH OUR POSITION THAT THE  
BASIC SOLUTION HAD TO BE FOUND IN A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE  
EAST SETTLEMENT.

9. SUMMING UP, GEMAYEL SENSED HE HAD A GOOD OPPORTUNITY  
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TO PRESENT HIS IDEAS FULLY AND TO ASK FOR U.S. SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL REFORM. IN TURN, HE RECEIVED A FULL EXPLANATION OF U.S. ATTITUDES IN CANDID SPIRITED EXCHANGES. HE WAS EXASPERATING IN HIS TENDENCY TO OUTLINE IN EXHAUSTING DETAIL THE FULL RANGE OF NEGATIVE FACTORS SURROUNDING AN ISSUE WITHOUT PROPOSING SPECIFIC ALTERNATIVES.

10. IN BACKGROUNDING THE LOCAL AN-NAHAR CORRESPONDENT ON GEMAYEL'S CALL ON ATHERTON, WE SAID THAT IT IS USUAL FOR ATHERTON TO MEET WITH PROMINENT VISITORS FROM THE AREA AND TO HEAR THEIR VIEWS, AND THAT NO MORE SHOULD BE READ INTO THE CALL. VANCE

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